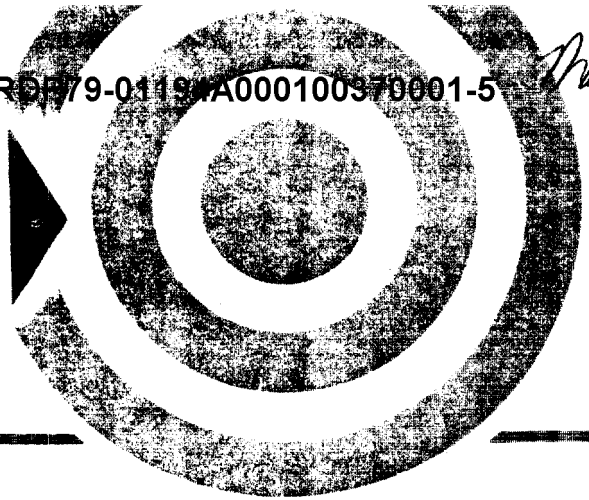


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# FEATURES



"The New Drug Routes" by Roger Devreker and Paul Emmanuel.  
Brussels Special, 27 May 1975.

The attached article, for your background information, is intended to supplement case officer knowledge regarding new drug routes through Amsterdam and the precautionary changes in smuggling techniques regularly worked out by international narcotics traffickers.

Interviews with narcotics enforcement agents have emphasized the need for stiffer drug laws and for realistic means of enforcement in Europe. Belgian police, for example, are handicapped by inadequate medical facilities for addicts and by weak narcotics laws which have not been revised since 1921. Convicted traffickers generally go free at the end of a year, resume smuggling activities, and become "much more polished and consequently harder to catch."

The article points out the flexibility of drug traffickers, their ability to adapt to changing police tactics and to expend seemingly limitless manpower and funds. The authors have traced in detail known drug routes, which cut through four continents and attest to the continuing need for international police cooperation.

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Brussels SPECIAL

[Article by Roger Devreker and Paul Emmanuel: "The New Drug Routes"]

The new drug offensive has been started from Amsterdam, where all the reestablished "connections" come together.

Fired point blank, the four shots hardly made any more noise than the back-firing of a motorcycle. The man, a fiftyish Oriental, coiled down in a haunting slow motion, a little like a genie of smoke returning to his Aladdin's lamp....

The silence, hardly interrupted by the lapping of the nearby canal, falls once again in this quarter of Amsterdam. Neither the shadows appearing from out of nowhere to take the body and lower it into the sea-green water which has recently licked the pilings of the Prins Henrikkade, nor the Chinese people bustling like frantic ants around a smoke-filled anthill, would disturb it again.

It is only the next day that the men from the Thoorenar main police station, alerted by a phone call, fish out the body of Chung Mon, age 54, better known in the Chinese quarter of Amsterdam by the name of "Uncle Mon." A prosperous merchant, but one the police called "de Peetvader" [translation unknown], a sort of Godfather in the Chinese community. Besides his restaurant, he also ran a gambling salon and big-hearted, never hesitated to rush to the aid of his less fortunate compatriots.

They are all restauranters, officially, these Orientals who haunt the Central Station area, especially Binnen Bantammerstraat, between the old Jewish quarter and the famous flea market. Leprous facades somewhat camouflaged by electric signs. Broken pavement, mildewy mortar and not the tiniest patch of light between the walls which lean precariously toward each other, narrow alleys here and there. Foreigners everywhere. Leathery faces, downcast eyes, an incredible mixture of races.

One speaks of the "Chinese Quarter" just as one would speak of the "Casbah" or the "ghetto," though for the Americans, "Tulip Town" has been nothing but "Poppy City" for several years. A fabulous poppy city where out of 800,000 inhabitants, some 5,000 are habitual drug users!

A town nicknamed "Europe's hypodermic" by the SUNDAY TIMES, where the opium dens are well known, where hashish is sold in the open street, where the police know but most of the time can do nothing, where one runs into faces as closed up as a wall with no windows, every few feet. In fact, an incredible tolerance, which would be hard to understand for anyone who is not very familiar with the Dutch, who would not be surprised to hear Minister of Health Irene Vorriink's son on the radio quoting prices on the drug market something like an economic reporter commenting on stock market prices.

Under these circumstances, the shooting in Prins Hendrikkade was attributed to a brawl and the affair, without ever being classified, will forever be considered by the investigators to be one of those mysteries fated never to be solved. "Uncle Mon" was another victim of something which now appears to be, although the Amsterdam police do not want to admit it yet, a war between drug "syndicates." In fact, a few days before, a certain C. S. Tan lost his life in a Rembrandtsplein night club. That murder itself followed that of the "heroin king," Yong Fatt-tang, last August. In the course of their investigations, the police also discovered a channel of distribution to Scandinavia and Toronto (Canada).

"The opium comes here in very small amounts though," explained Colonel Elbersen, age 59, head of the "Drug Team" (only 9 men) in the port town. "And that is mainly destined for 'inside' consumption in the Oriental community."

Secretive about his counteractive methods, the officer minimized the importance of all the pieces of the puzzle which he is putting together day by day.

"We have checked a good thousand Chinese legally established here, the majority of them with British passports, and three times more illegal ones. During the summer, 5,000 to 6,000 young tourists come here from all over the world. You think that is not a lot? Amsterdam is not a big city, you know. We watch that entire 'marginal' population carefully. Don't ask me how. I do not like to talk about my work methods, but I can assure you that the evolution of the situation does not escape us. The progress of our confiscations proves it, only 2.5 kg of heroin in 1972, but 23 kg in 1973 and 26 kg in 1974!

And if one protests that the town is in the process of turning into the hub of the European drug market, he answers with the utmost energy: "Just one of the drug markets. The same as Paris, Brussels, Stuttgart or Frankfurt. A large part of what is sold here comes from Germany or Belgium. Don't forget that France has always been the supplier for the northern countries. Calling Amsterdam the hub would be an exaggeration!"

Indeed. Last year an ABC Network news report caused a sensation in the United States and angered the Dutch. It charged, with the brutality characteristic of the press across the Atlantic, that Amsterdam was the new drug Mecca, and devoted a long sequence to Vondelpark where, with shocking carelessness and under the blank stares of police passing like sleepwalkers, a group of young people, the majority of them American, no longer even concealed their "smoking." With a quavering voice, the reporter recounted his trip to the "Paradiso" and "Melkweg," two deconsecrated churches where "pop" music provides a good background for those who "get bombed" in an atmosphere as serene as a library. And to conclude: "The Dutch are undoubtedly the most curious people in all of Europe. But there is a certain number of things that the tourist does not realize. In the space of 2 years, Amsterdam has supplanted Marseilles in the field of narcotics traffic and now people are talking about a 'Dutch Connection.'"

That opinion is shared by the Drug Enforcement Administration (formerly the Narcotics Bureau) detectives, those incorruptible men with vast technical and financial means, who took care of, among others, the famous "French Connection" and whose relations with their Amsterdam counterparts have been smoothed out again after having been strained, to say the least.

"Amsterdam is, in fact, a hub," said a "special agent" who lives between Paris and Brussels just as any young multinational official would. If the Belgian capital or Luxembourg are sometimes chosen as a "jumping off point" for certain couriers, it is simply because from there, there is really no border with Holland any more.

"But also," one of his Belgian colleagues said, without trying to hide his bitterness, "because our country is the weakest link in the European control chain! In case of arrest, and our Customs Administration and police have many to their credit, all the smuggler faces, whether he is carrying 500 grams or 2,000 kg of drugs, is a sentence of 18 months to 2 years."

"The 24 February 1921 law is still in effect," complained Major Francois, age 37, who is in charge of coordinating the activities of the police within a National Narcotics Brigade. "And if the Vranckx Bill still seems to be blocked since 1971, it is not just because the successive governments have been absorbed with other problems, especially by the language problem... or that the composition of the parliamentary committees responsible for studying it has to be changed constantly. What the bill in question is aimed at is clearly establishing the difference on the penal level between the trafficker and the consumer, which is not clear today. However, adopting a bill is not enough to hope to change the situation, tightening the control on the 'supplier' level and liberalizing the attitude toward the addict. When a law is signed, the system for its enforcement should already be set up. Now, in Belgium, it is the medical infrastructure that is lacking. Of course, several clinics have had to take care of certain cases and the work that has been accomplished there is absolutely extraordinary. But those doctors, psychologists and social workers did the work in addition to other things. A whole legal system cannot be established on a network of volunteers.

"Minister Vranckx' bill is a combination of things, and since one part of that combination is unachievable, the whole thing remains blocked. Belgium continues to be a 'Never Never Land' for traffickers who get caught by the law.

"What is really dangerous," Major Francois added, "is that the smugglers whom we arrest go free generally at the end of a year, as long as they adopt a respectful attitude toward the warden and attend Mass even if they are Muslims. With a favorable report and a remission of sentence, they go back on the road to Southeast Asia. We find them again, scarcely a few months later, maybe not any smarter but much more 'polished,' and consequently harder to catch!"

So there they are, hooked up again with one of the "connections" which are made and unmade according to circumstances and to the demands of the immutable law of supply and demand.

"Their techniques of transporting and consumption change as they go along," said Major Francois. Of course, we keep constantly adapting to those techniques to fight them as effectively as possible. Sometimes we even adopt the same structures as their rings to better understand their workings. That is how we have been able to keep up with the evolution of the smugglers' techniques so well.

"Storm" and "Shotgun"

Those smuggling techniques deserve some explanation. It would be childish to believe that if the crime-fighting machinery literally dissected the workings of the rings any time it was possible, the reverse could not also happen. The press, everytime an important "bust" is made public, or through certain indiscretions, provides the traffickers with information. They are mainly becoming aware of the fact that the arrests are never due to luck anymore and that basically, there is almost always important "intelligence" work being done by the national services or information being transmitted either by local Drug Enforcement Administration [DEA] agents or by Interpol.

This being the situation, two solutions are possible for the "brains" who almost never leave the famous "Golden Triangle," the access routes to which are still Hong Kong, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur: give up the shipment and suffer the financial setback which that implies, or sacrifice a few "couriers" along with a part of the precious merchandise.

If they opt for the second solution, they organize the trip with the precision and care of a travel agent. They usually arrange it so that one man carrying a relatively large amount of the drug is arrested in a western airport. Since the news of the arrest is immediately transmitted to all the narcotics-fighting organizations, it is like an end to the alert, and the surveillance automatically relaxes. That is the time -- that is, on the flights immediately following the one on which the "sacrificed courier" was placed -- when the others arrive.

If, for example, a trafficker is arrested in Zaventem on a Monday morning at around 0800 hours, it is on the same Monday between 1000 and 1600 hours that the other smugglers, their luggage stuffed with drugs, land in Bourget, Schipol, Luxembourg, Frankfurt....

This is the "shotgun" technique. Or, all the carriers take seats on the same plane with the sacrificed one, who is usually sacrificed with his own knowledge. Sometimes his exact description is even discreetly communicated to the police at the airport of his destination. In such cases, the arrest of the first smuggler causes the relaxation of vigilance on which all the others rely to slip through the mesh of the net. That is the "storm" technique which worked up until last 11 January.

That day, the men of the National Narcotics Brigade made eight arrests, eight passengers on Flight No. SN286 from Bangkok, and seized a mere trifling of 25 kg of heroin at Brussels-National! It was one of the biggest hauls ever in the annals of the war on drugs.

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### Complex Products

But it is mainly the consumption techniques which really worry those in charge of stopping the most frightening plague in years.

There is an evolution of the product from the simplest to the most complex. It is an economic fact, and all transporters will tell you that the more concentrated and expensive the product carried is, the more profitable the operation promises to be. Following that principle, at first the authorities, whether in Paris, Amsterdam, Rome or London, saw the development of the "grass" trade. It began with the cannabis leaves and flowers, the Delta-9-Tetrahydrocannabinol content of which ranged between 5 and 8 percent. It has been several years now since the police quit seizing the drug in that form.

Rather than transporting a bulky but "poor" product, one with a low resale value, the producers then began to export the same drug in the form of a resin, much more concentrated, with a content sometimes exceeding 15 percent but a kilogram of it scarcely weighing more than a pocket-size book. The "bricks" of hashish are widely variable in color, red if they come from Lebanon and almost black if they come from Afghanistan.

At present, that form of the drug is progressively disappearing in favor of the "oil," an extract obtained by distillation of the resin with methanol steam. The oily solution which results from that process has a 50 to 80 percent concentration of tetrahydrocannabinol!

Now, it is the "oil" which the authorities seize more and more frequently, which tends to prove that the producers and their chemists -- who are always called "Panier graduates" in memory of the Panier quarter in Marseilles, a veritable drug exchange after the war -- have definitely opted for a more complex form of the product.

### "Brown Sugar"

Similarly, and the dangers of this new tendency are obvious, the "death dealers" have modified their sales techniques, doing away with the psychological barrier the "pot smoker" must necessarily cross to become a "junky" or heroin addict...

"To get the young European drug users to cross this threshold, the pushers are looking for formulas for mixtures which will make it possible to smoke heroin!

"You know," Major Francois explained, "that heroin comes from the poppy. Crushed and reduced to a paste, the capsules which contain its flowers give opium. It is from the opium obtained in the laboratory, basic morphine, that heroin is refined. To simplify, we will call the basic morphine 'No. 1'; basic heroin 'No. 2'; processed, inhalable heroin 'No. 3' or 'brown sugar' and refined, injectable heroin 'No. 4' or 'white.' It is the 'brown sugar,' heroin mixed with quinine, caffeine, sometimes a little strychnine and barbitol, that is now smoked in Europe in a special pipe with a flared bowl. A few of them have already been seized in Belgium and it is extremely disquieting! And what is also worrying us is the demand for that processed heroin. If the demand were to increase, we could actually find ourselves one day with an underground laboratory on our hands."

## Turkish Opium

If the drugs are a plague, the laboratories are its sores. It was an abscess rather, located around Marseilles, which an energetic action effected jointly by the French and American services in charge of the war on drugs was able to lance.

However, those laboratories were tactically important because all the networks necessarily converged on them. All the "connections" and all the "couriers" to the United States and to Latin America started there.

"In those days," the head of the Belgian National Narcotics Brigade recalled, "the two or three big European 'families,' the Italians, the Corsicans and the Spanish, had divided up the western 'market' among themselves with the Mafia's arbitration. Partners, sometimes rivals, they managed to supply the American market more or less regularly with raw materials coming from Turkey.

"But suddenly, at the same time that the underground laboratories were discovered one after another, the Anatolian source began to run dry. In fact, anxious to stop the growing of opium, most of the derivatives of which ended up in the United States, the American administration then decided to compensate the Turkish growers who would agree to pull up their poppy fields. Thus, millions of dollars were injected into the country's various economic circuits, the people it was really intended for not receiving one cent of the benefits. Several politicians took advantage of the peasants' growing discontent, promising them, after having fattened their bank accounts with the dollars that were meant precisely for them, to abolish all the laws prohibiting poppy growing.

"And since, looking forward to the legislative elections which took place last year, the same promise was made by the majority candidates as well as the opposition, the Anatolian peasants went back to their lucrative crops which are now reaching their harvest season."

Thus, the activity promises to be heated toward the end of the year when the first opium shipments coming from the poppy harvests begin to reach us, probably after having been halfway around the globe from refinery to laboratory, on their way to the "distribution center" which is undoubtedly Amsterdam. (According to the DEA, it has been said that the French dealers in particular have placed large orders for the summer. It is a recreation of the "French Connection.")

The Dutch capital has been the center since 1971. That was also when the narcotics brigade was created. In Marseilles, the regional "heads" of the traffic fell one after another, the suppliers no longer had anything to send their colleagues across the Atlantic and the Turkish sources had dried up. . .

From the time of their arrival in the Netherlands, those nuclei of suppliers and consumers quickly reconnected their networks, at first to satisfy their own needs and then, tempted by the lure of profits, thus supplying the "pushers" who were out of stock.

As long as Turkish opium is not found on the market to change the basic problem, the route starting in the Far East and ending in the ghettos of the sprawling American cities, passing through two or three large European "sorting centers" on the way, will still be the typical path. Of course, others are being added on, which evolve, change direction, curve in and

Last 16 March, a circuit exclusively for supplying the American residents of West Germany was dismantled. Bought in Amsterdam, the drug was sent to the base in Bitburg in the Eifel, organized, it seems, in a distributing center for the whole country. The traffickers, an American military man and the wife of one of his colleagues, were intercepted while driving on the Liege-Maastricht highway in a rented car. Before that, the smugglers deposited the drug in the woods covering the Holland-Germany border. It was then transported on foot to the no man's land. The system had been operating for several months.

More united than rivals because of the common danger of being caught, hashish smugglers sometimes use opium or "white" carriers. But one phenomenon, confirmed by a whole series of arrests on various borders, seems to be well established: the nucleus of the network is in Amsterdam, just as if the traffic were going two directions only, into that city and out of it.

From North Africa, hashish crosses Spain thanks to some Iberian "connections," then France after having crossed the Pyrenees, to arrive finally in Benelux. It is a long trip, filled with danger and risks to which the traffickers gladly prefer sea transport. The recent "bust" off Nieuport harbor is conclusive proof of that.

Following a breakdown, an impressive motor yacht called the "September Tide" had to make a short stopover in the small pleasure port. Suspicious, the maritime police examined their papers carefully and the constabulary their cargo. It contained a ton of hashish, valued at 40 million Belgian francs! The Dutch captain admitted that he had bought the boat from a British subject on the Anglo-Norman island of Jersey. From there, he sailed near Morocco, off Ceuta, to pick up a delivery. The "September Tide" then went back up north along the coast. Destination: Amsterdam. A faulty clutch kept it from reaching a safe harbor.

#### Aerial Routes

What a coincidence! At the same time as that seizure, 10 Zealanders were appearing before the Middelburg court for narcotics trafficking. Their circuit passed through Brussels-National and came from Zaire. Drop point already too well known: the woody surroundings of the border village of Roosdaal, precisely where the guards had been removed after the lowering of the customs barriers was decreed by the Common Market.

The Southeast Asian "syndicate" entrusts its precious merchandise to the airlines. According to the BNS [National Narcotics Brigade] detectives, they prefer flights with many stopovers during which they can change either their flight or their itinerary. The "outlying" airports on that circuit are Bourget, Frankfurt, Zaventem and Luxembourg.

In short, all the "secondary" highway border posts are used by the couriers specializing in highway transport, past masters in the techniques of "stashings," the hiding places rigged up in all sorts of vehicles, from the semi-truck to the little sports car.

One after another, these techniques are found out, the smugglers are arrested, the pushers unmasked. Then new circuits appear and other producers rush to assault a market which is far from saturated....

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